midnight nation
created by j. michael straczynski

"THE WHEEL"

cover
gary frank
jonathan sibal
matt milla

Previously:
The final offer has been made. The choice is now David's. His soul. Her life.

writer
j. michael straczynski

penciler
gary frank

inker
jonathan sibal

colorist
avalon studios'
matt milla

letterers
dreamer design's
robin spehar & dennis heisler

managing editor
renae geerlings

editor in chief
david wohl

editorial assistants
scott tucker & sina grace

no free time
peter steigerwald

headaches
the old man
chawklet
jeep
amazon
eddie

MARC SILVESTRI chief executive officer
MATT HAWKINS president / chief operating officer
DAVID WOHL president of creative affairs / editor in chief
PETER STEIGERWALD vice president of publishing and design / art director
RENAE GEERLINGS managing editor
CHRIS CARLISLE director of creative affairs
FRANK MASTROMAURO director of sales and marketing
ALVIN COATS special projects coordinator

Address Correspondence to:
Midnight Nation c/o Top Cow Productions Inc.
10390 Santa Monica Blvd. No. 110, Los Angeles, Ca. 90025
E-Mail: midnightnation@topcow.com

for Midnight Nation and Joe's Comics previews, message boards and more go to
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STRACZYNSKI
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MILLA
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LAUREL!
AS I SAID, THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO.
SHE IS DYING.

THOUGH DEATH IS NOW INEVITABLE, SHE WILL NOT DIE UNTIL YOU RELEASE HER. SO WE HAVE TIME TO TALK.
YOU CANNOT SAVE HER.
ANY MORE THAN THEY COULD, WHEN THEY CAME ON THIS JOURNEY WITH HER.
YOU CAN ONLY AFFECT HOW SHE DIES, WHY SHE DIES, AND WHAT HAPPENS AFTER.
YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO TALK ABOUT MY SOUL. WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH THIS? WHAT THE HELL DO YOU WANT FROM ME?
I WANT NOTHING FROM YOU, DAVID. I WANT ONLY TO GIVE YOU BACK YOUR SOUL, AS I PROMISED I WOULD. WILL YOU NOW ACCEPT IT?

NO.
NOT UNTIL YOU TELL ME WHAT MY SOUL HAS TO DO WITH LAUREL.
YOU ARE CONCERNED FOR HER.
GODDAMNED RIGHT I AM.
EVEN THOUGH THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO FOR HER.
I DON'T BELIEVE THAT.
AM I TELLING HIM THE TRUTH, LAUREL? IS THERE ANYTHING HE CAN DO TO SAVE YOU?

YOU KNOW I DON'T WANT TO DO THIS. YOU KNOW I TAKE NO PLEASURE IN THIS. WHY DO YOU ALLOW IT?
IS REBELLION REALLY WORSE THAN THIS?
I LOVED YOU ONCE. THAT IS HOW THE MAKER PUNISHES ME. BY SENDING YOU TO ENDURE THIS. OVER AND OVER AND OVER.
LET ME SAVE YOU. LET ME END THIS.
REBEL.
NO.
DO AS YOU MUST.
THEN I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN.

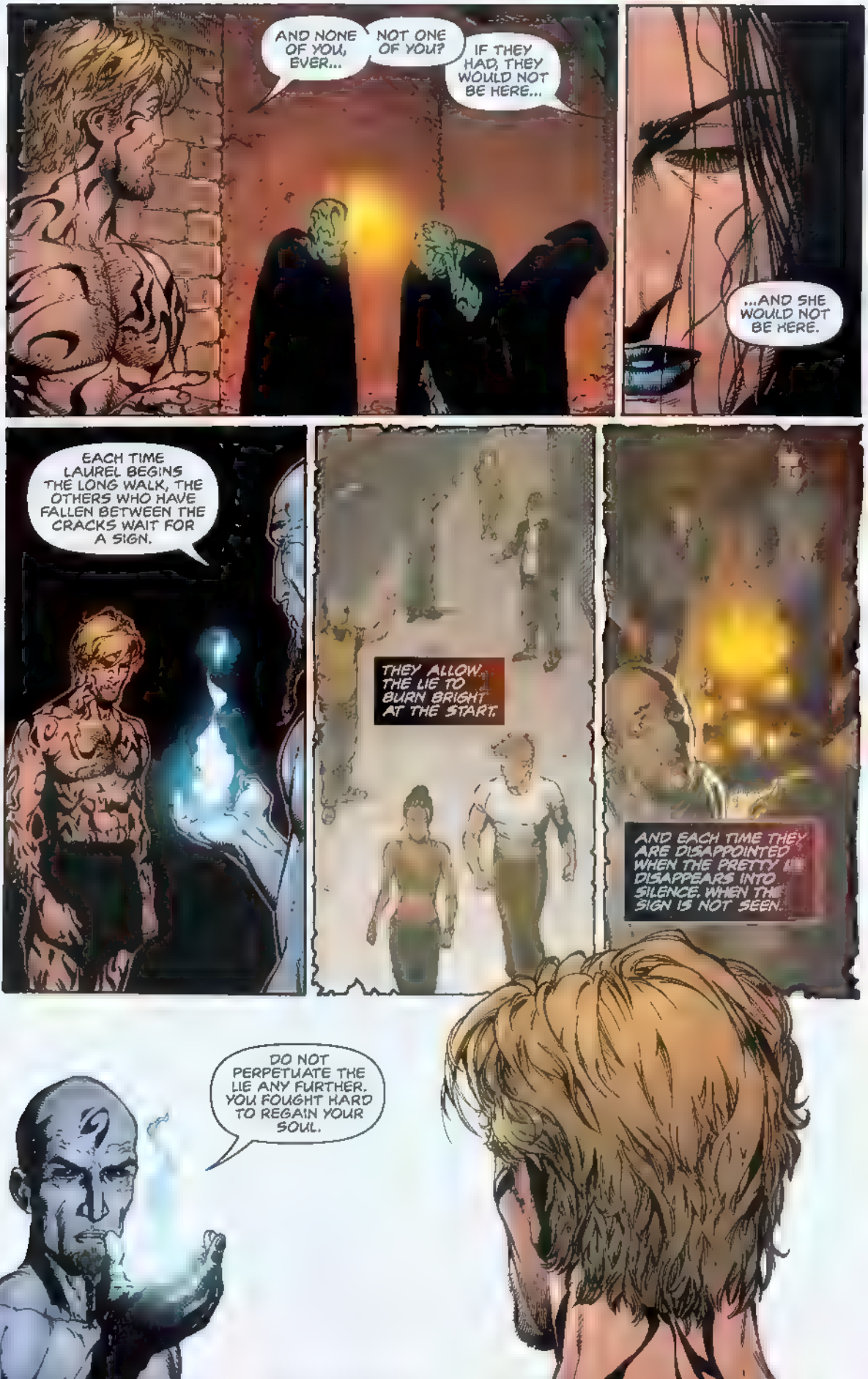
YOU SAID YOU CARE FOR HER.
YES.
YOU WANT TO HELP HER.
YES.
DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHAT SHE IS?
A WOMAN IN NEED, PERHAPS, LIKE YOUR WIFE WHEN YOU RAN OUT ON HER? LIKE THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE YOU PASSED BY ON YOUR WAY HERE, AND COULD NOT HELP?
SHE DECEIVED YOU, DAVID. SHE MISLED YOU AND LIED TO YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY. SHE'S NONE OF THOSE THINGS. SHE'S NOT A WOMAN IN NEED. SHE'S NOT YOUR ALLY, DAVID.
SHE'S NOT EVEN HUMAN.
LET THE SCALES FALL FROM YOUR EYES, DAVID. SEE HER AS SHE IS.
SEE HER AS I SEE HER.

ENOUGH.
NO, WAIT--
SOME THINGS CANNOT BE LOOKED UPON FOR TOO LONG.
LOOK AT HER FOR WHAT SHE IS, INSTEAD OF WHAT SHE IS NOT. AND UNDERSTAND...
YOU HAVE BEEN DECEIVED FROM THE VERY BEGINNING. ABOUT WHO SHE IS, WHAT SHE IS, AND WHAT YOU HAD AT RISK.
BUT I HAVE NEVER LIED TO YOU. NOR WILL I START NOW.
TIME NOW FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH.
WHAT SHE IS, WHAT SHE TRULY IS, WAITS IN THE VOID UNTIL SHE IS SUMMONED.
UNTIL I TOUCH SOMEONE, AS I TOUCHED YOU.

SHE TOLD YOU THAT YOU HAD ONE YEAR TO REGAIN YOUR SOUL. AND THAT IS TRUE, BUT NOT SO THAT YOU COULD AVOID MY SERVICE.
BECAUSE, YOU SEE, EVERYONE WHO WORKS IN MY SERVICE... HAS REGAINED HIS SOUL.
BUT... THE MARKINGS KEPT GROWING--
THE MARKINGS COME FROM MY TOUCH. THEY SIGNIFY THAT YOU ARE MY PROPERTY. THE LONGER YOU REMAIN ON THIS SIDE AFTER I'VE TOUCHED YOU, THE MORE YOUR HEART TURNS TOWARD ME, THE MORE THE MARKINGS GROW. THE MARKINGS OF A WALKER SAY THAT YOU BELONG TO ME, THAT YOU BELONG SOMEWHERE. AND THAT IS IMPORTANT.
BECAUSE WITHOUT A SOUL, YOU BELONG NOWHERE
THE DEADLINE IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE AFTER A YEAR, YOUR SOUL CANNOT BE RECLAIMED. WITHOUT A SOUL, YOU WOULD WANDER THE EARTH, TRAPPED BETWEEN THE TWO WORLDS, NEVER BELONGING WHOLLY TO ONE OF THE OTHER.
WITHOUT A SOUL, YOU ARE OF NO USE TO HER, OR TO ME. BECAUSE WITHOUT A SOUL, YOU CANNOT CHOOSE.
YOUR SOUL IS THE ONLY COIN YOU CAN BRING TO THE TABLE, DAVID. AND THEY WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE IT IN HAND WHEN THE TIME COMES TO CHOOSE.
BUT THE CHOICE THEY OFFER IS NO CHOICE AT ALL. THEY SAY IT'S ABOUT HOPE, BUT THE CHOICE ONLY REINFORCES THE ONE SINGULAR TRUTH OF THIS WORLD: THAT HOPE IS A LIE.

HOPE IS PREDICATED UPON THE ASSUMPTION THAT NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES YOU FALL, YOU CAN STAND UP IF YOU KEEP TRYING, THAT NO MATTER HOW FUTILE A SITUATION MAY APPEAR, YOU CAN EVENTUALLY SUCCEED.
THAT NO ONE IS SO FAR FALLEN THAT HE CANNOT COME BACK HOME.
SO THEY SEND HER OUT, TIME AFTER TIME AFTER TIME, ACROSS THE YEARS, ACROSS THE CENTURIES, TO PLAY OUT THE GAME, TO ENDURE THE PAIN, THE BLEEDING, THE WHEEL AND, ULTIMATELY, DEATH, ONLY TO BE SENT OUT AGAIN INTO THE SAME POINTLESS QUEST.
THEY REFUSE TO ADMIT THE TRUTH, THAT HOPE IS A LIE, SO THE MAKER OF ALL THINGS KEEPS SENDING HER FORTH. AND OTHERS LIKE HER. TO SUFFER ON HIS BEHALF, HIS WHIM. OVER AND OVER, TO THE END OF TIME.
HERE THEN, IS YOUR SOUL.
HERE, THEN, IS THE CHOICE.
I GIVE YOU BACK YOUR SOUL FREELY. YOU MAY TAKE IT. YOU WILL RETAIN THE MARKINGS OF A WALKER, AND YOU WILL REMAIN IN MY SERVICE.
BUT YOU WILL BE WHOLE AGAIN, AND YOU WILL LIVE FOR AS LONG AS I DO. WHEN I DO NOT HAVE NEED OF YOU, YOUR LIFE IS YOUR OWN
THOSE WHO SEE YOU WILL FEAR YOU, BUT YOU NEED FEAR NO ONE EVER AGAIN.

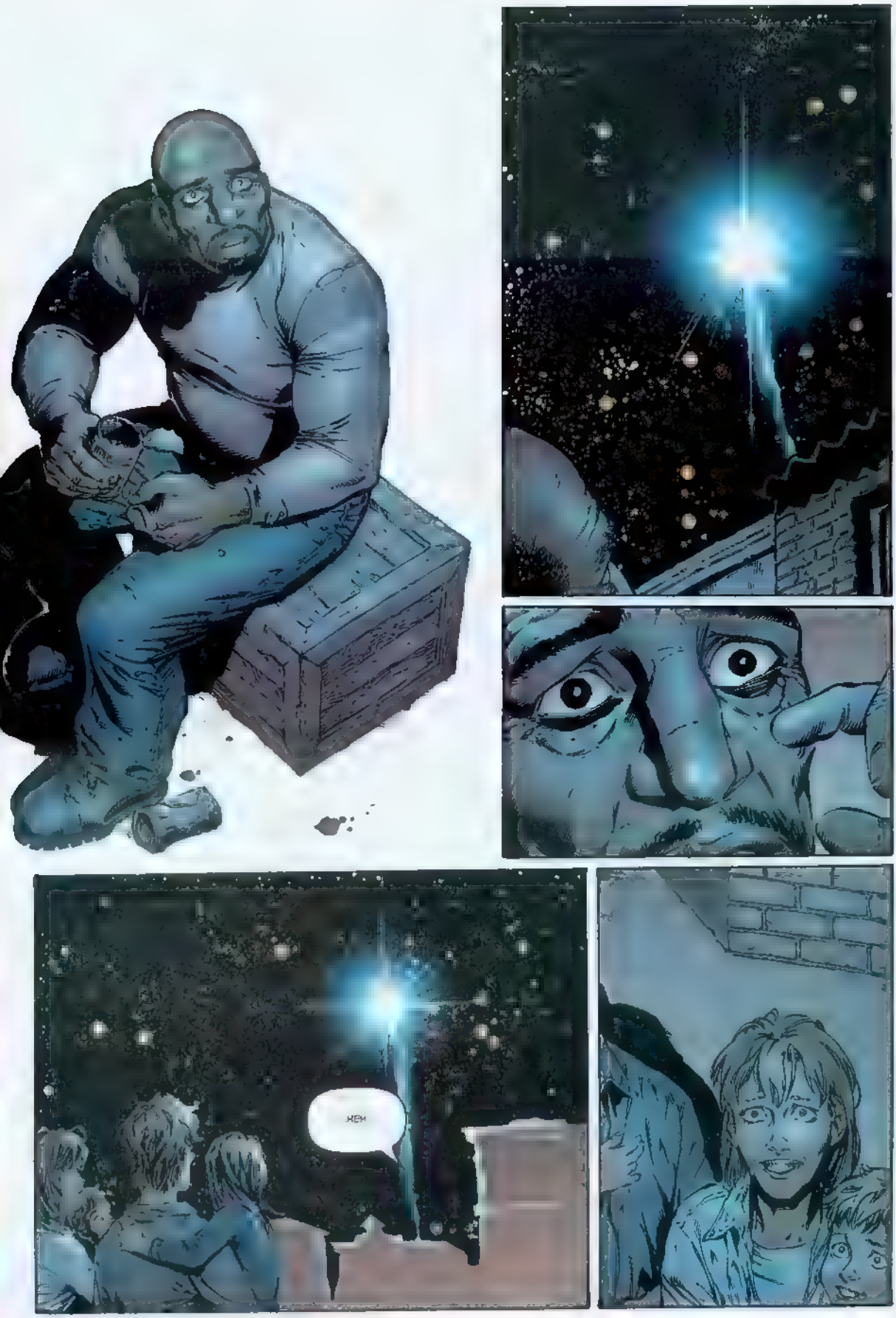
OR...
YOU GIVE YOUR SOUL TO HER. YOU END HER CYCLE OF PAIN. FOR AS SHE IS, SHE IS NOT HUMAN. SHE IS SOULLESS.
BUT WITH A SOUL, SHE CAN BE BORN INTO THE WORLD AS A HUMAN.
SHE WOULD LIVE AS A HUMAN, DIE AS A HUMAN, AND AT THE END RECEIVE BLISS OR PAIN AS ANY OTHER HUMAN.
BUT UNDERSTAND: IF YOU GIVE UP YOUR SOUL FOR HER, YOU WILL BE A WANDERER, NEVER BELONGING WHOLLY TO EITHER WORLD. FORSAKEN BY THE MAKER OF ALL THINGS, AND BY ME.
YOUR MARKINGS WILL FADE, FOR YOU WILL NO LONGER BE MINE. YOU WILL BELONG NOWHERE.
TODAY.
TOMORROW.
AND THROUGH THE END OF TIME ITSELF.
CHOOSE.


AND NONE OF YOU, EVER...
NOT ONE OF YOU?
IF THEY HAD, THEY WOULD NOT BE HERE...
...AND SHE WOULD NOT BE HERE.
EACH TIME LAUREL BEGINS THE LONG WALK, THE OTHERS WHO HAVE FALLEN BETWEEN THE CRACKS WAIT FOR A SIGN.
THEY ALLOW THE LIE TO BURN BRIGHT AT THE START.
AND EACH TIME THEY ARE DISAPPOINTED WHEN THE PRETTY LIE DISAPPEARS INTO SILENCE. WHEN THE SIGN IS NOT SEEN.
DO NOT PERPETUATE THE LIE ANY FURTHER. YOU FOUGHT HARD TO REGAIN YOUR SOUL.

STRUGGLED THROUGH PAIN AND WINTER AND HARDSHIP
TAKE WHAT YOU CAME FOR. TAKE WHAT IS YOURS TO TAKE.

I'M SORRY, LAUREL. I CAME ALL THIS WAY--
I KNOW. I FORGIVE YOU, DAVID.
--BUT I GUESS I PUT YOU THROUGH ALL THIS FOR NOTHING.

...NOTHING...?
I LOVE YOU.
AAAAAAAGGGGHHH!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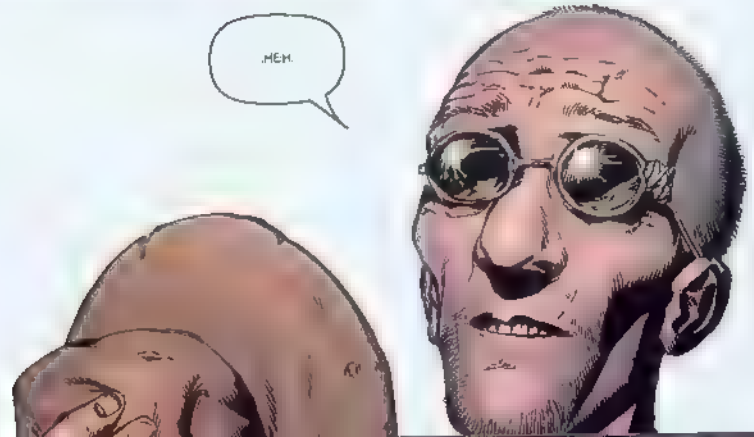
YOU OKAY?
YEAH... I THINK I'M GONNA BE JUST FINE.


.HEH.

...COLD... WHY IS IT SO COLD...?

HUH.
WELL.
I CERTAINLY DIDN'T SEE THAT COMING.

IT'S OVER.
HE GAVE FOR ME.
YES.
YES, YOUR LONG JOURNEY IS NOW DONE.
BUT HIS IS JUST BEGINNING.
HOW WILL HE KNOW THAT I LOVED HIM?
YES.
HE WILL KNOW.
HE HAD A LOVELY SOUL. I DON'T THINK HE EVER KNEW THAT.
HE WILL KNOW THIS. REST NOW.
I CAN FEEL... I CAN FEEL MY HEART BEATING.
I KNOW.
GOODBYE.
GOODBYE. FOR NOW.

HEY BUDDY... YOU OKAY?
YOU OKAY?
071902
MIFFY
...HELP ME...
TO BE CONTINUED.